



San Diego City Attorney Michael J. Aguirre

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Maria Velasquez, Communications Director: (619) 235-5725 mvelasquez@saniego.gov

ALLEGATIONS OF RENT GOUGING BY LANDLORDS IN WAKE OF FIRE DISASTER

Victims Urged to Contact the City Attorney's Consumer and Environmental Protection Unit

San Diego, CA—The San Diego City Attorney's Office is investigating allegations that landlords are illegally hiking rental housing prices due to the recent fire disaster in the County that impacted the City of San Diego. Members of the City Attorney's Office have been canvassing neighborhoods in Rancho Bernardo since Saturday speaking with residents affected by the fires. More than 300 homes in Rancho Bernardo were destroyed by the Witch Creek Fire.

"Complaints of rent gouging are especially troubling as those who lost their homes have to scramble to put roofs over their head," said City Attorney Michael Aguirre. "Re-victimizing fire victims is an especially contemptible crime, and we will use the resources of the City Attorney's Office to protect San Diegans."

State and local laws prohibit excessive price increases on essential goods and services for thirty days following an emergency or natural disaster—and this includes housing. Landlords may only increase the rent to ten percent or less above the rent charged prior to the emergency with limited exception. Under State law, "housing" is defined as any rental unit leased month-to-month. San Diego has a tougher ordinance which includes one-year leases.

Rent manipulation during an emergency is a misdemeanor and is punishable by imprisonment for up to one year in county jail and/or a \$10,000 fine.

The City Attorney's Office is urging those who have experienced rent gouging in the City of San Diego to contact the City Attorney's Consumer and Environmental Protection Unit at (619) 533-5600. Staff members are available between the hours of 9 a.m. - 11 a.m., and 1 p.m. - 3 p.m., Monday-Friday. Victims can also find a complaint form by visiting the City Attorney's web site at www.sandiegocityattorney.org, click "Report Consumer Scams and Rip-Offs." The form is located on the left-hand side of the page. ###